

**Town of Westford, Vermont**  
**Social Media and Communications Policy**  
**Approved 8/22/2024**

**SECTION 1: TITLE AND AUTHORITY**

This policy shall be known as the Town of Westford, Vermont Social Media and Communications Policy (hereafter “policy”). It has been adopted by the Town of Westford Selectboard pursuant to 24 V.S.A. §§ 1121, 1122, and 872.

The Selectboard reserves the right to amend any of the provisions of this policy for any reason and at any time, with or without notice.

This policy is administered by the Selectboard or its authorized representative or designee.

**SECTION 2: PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to provide standards and procedures for the appropriate use of municipal social media platforms. This policy gives direction to municipal employees, elected officials, volunteers, appointees, public bodies, and other authorized users of municipal social media.

The Town may utilize social media to communicate information related to the business of the Town directly to the public including, emergency alerts, career opportunities, operations and services provided by the Town. The Town has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is published on behalf of the Town through social media and in establishing guidelines for the use of municipal social media by municipal officials. Municipal social media platforms shall not be construed as community pages and as such shall not be used for the promotion, benefit or furtherance of public organizations, activities or businesses unless given express permission by the Selectboard or its authorized representative.

**SECTION 3: DEFINITIONS**

The following definitions shall apply to this policy:

**Content** means any post, writing, comment, remark, response, material, document, photograph, graphic, or other information of any kind, regardless of form that is created, posted, shared, distributed, or transmitted via the Town’s social media platform.

**Town** means the Town of Westford, Vermont.

**Municipal electronic equipment** means all municipal electronic equipment – including computers, cell phones, smart phones, pagers, any associated hardware or software, and any other municipal equipment – that may be utilized to send or receive electronic communications.

**Municipal official** means an employee of the Town, elected or appointed, or a municipal volunteer.

**Municipal social media** or **municipal social media platform** means the official social media platform of the Town.

**Municipal website** or **official municipal website** means the official website or domain of the Town.

**Social media platform or social media** means a form of information-sharing platforms (such as Facebook, Front Porch Forum, Google and Yahoo Groups, Wikipedia, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, LinkedIn, or other news media or content-sharing service) on which online content and dialogue around specific issues or area of interest are created.

**User or public user** means a member of the general public who accesses, distributes or shares content to a municipal social media platform.

#### **SECTION 4: CONDUCT OF MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS**

Those persons designated and authorized to utilize municipal social media do so with the understanding that they represent the Town via social media outlets and must always conduct themselves appropriately. Municipal officials must also consider content carefully, understanding that it will be widely accessible, not retractable, and retained or referenced for a long period of time. The Town expects its officials to be truthful, courteous, and respectful toward their colleagues, residents, customers, members of the general public, and other persons associated with or who do business with the Town.

This policy is not intended to discourage any elected or appointed official from exercising their First Amendment rights. However, municipal officials must keep in mind that their personal communications can be perceived as official communications or positions of the Selectboard and Town. Municipal officials must practice discretion when communicating online. The Town supports an open exchange of views on community and government issues. Municipal officials may participate in these exchanges when such participation is valuable to the overall dialogue. Any response should be in accordance with the following protocol:

- **Selectboard:** In accordance with The Selectboard Rules of Procedure, Section C (4) no single member of the body shall have authority to represent or act on behalf of the body unless, by majority vote, the body has delegated such authority for a specific matter at a duly warned meeting and such delegation is recorded in the minutes.  
As residents of the Town of Westford, Selectboard members may participate in exchanges or dialogues as individuals, however. To the extent practicable, such participation shall conform to this policy regardless of forum. If an individual Selectboard member chooses to participate in this manner, that member will preface their communication with a disclaimer that they are expressing their personal opinion, and they should inform the other Selectboard members of this participation.
- **Other Municipal Officials:** Appointed officials may participate in the above referenced exchanges or dialogues as individuals so long as they make it clear that they are acting on their own behalf and not on behalf of the municipal body to which they belong, unless they are delegated by their body to make the communication. To the extent practicable, such participation shall conform to this policy regardless of forum.

Municipal officials' use of municipal social media shall comply with this policy as well as with the Town's personnel and any other relevant policies, its charter provisions, rules, and regulations. This includes any use of municipal social media from outside of the workplace.

**Official Use of Municipal Social Media Platforms.** Municipal officials who use municipal social media in their official capacity, in the scope of their employment or while on duty must:

- Only post content on those matters that fall within their job description or statutory roles and responsibilities.
- Keep postings factual, accurate, and up to date. If a mistake is made, admit to it and post a correction as soon as possible.
- Never post content on anything related to legal matters, litigation, or any parties with whom the Town may be in litigation without prior specific approval from the Selectboard.
- Municipal officials are expressly prohibited from disclosing any information via content posted to municipal social media that may be confidential.
- Never engage in name-calling or personal attacks or other behavior that may be demeaning.

Information posted to municipal social media is public and is subject to Vermont's Public Records Law, Open Meetings Law, and all other applicable laws, rules, policies, municipal charter provisions, and regulations. Municipal officials should have no expectation of privacy regarding the information posted on municipal social media nor in anything created, sent, or received on municipal electronic equipment. The Town may investigate and monitor any communication and transmission to ensure compliance with this policy and the use of its equipment.

All authorized municipal officials must be provided with a copy of this policy and sign the Acknowledgement of Official Use by Municipal Officials form (see Addendum A) prior to utilizing municipal social media.

## **SECTION 5: DESIGNATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS**

For each of the Town's social media platforms, the Selectboard has identified and designated the type of speech forum, its purpose, and rules, as follows:

### **1. Government Speech Forums.**

The following platforms are hereby designated as government speech forums:

- Official Town Website: <https://westfordvt.us/>
- Official Town Facebook page: TBD

These platforms do not allow any public user content. They are reserved for the municipal government to engage in its own expressive conduct, to promote its own message, and to distribute information. No comments, or other feedback will be allowed on content posted to Government Speech Forums.

### **2. Limited Public Forums.**

The following platforms are hereby designated as limited public forums:

- Westford Public Library Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/WestfordPublicLibrary/](http://www.facebook.com/WestfordPublicLibrary/)
- Westford Recreation Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/WestfordRecreationDepartment/](http://www.facebook.com/WestfordRecreationDepartment/)

In a limited public forum, public user content is restricted, based on designated categories for which the social media platform has been opened. Designated categories are those matters raised by municipal content on the social media platform. Public users posting or responding to content constitutes participation in a limited public forum.

### **3. Other Platforms.**

The Town of Westford authorizes municipal officials to utilize public forums like Front Porch Forum to make announcements and share information regarding Town activities, events, notices, etc. Posts made to Front Porch Forum by municipal officials shall comply with all aspects of this policy.

## **SECTION 7: ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT**

Municipal officials may only establish new municipal social media on behalf of the Town after approval by the Selectboard or its authorized representative or designee. The Selectboard or its authorized representative reserves the right to establish and/or terminate municipal social media accounts. In this role, the Selectboard or its authorized representative will evaluate all requests for usage, verify staff authorized to use municipal social media tools, and confirm completion of online training for social media, if deemed necessary. The Selectboard or its authorized representative is responsible for maintaining a list of all social media platforms in use and the names of all administrators of these accounts.

All municipal social media platforms shall be created by a designated municipal officer with the approval and under the direction of the Selectboard or its authorized representative and shall be published using approved municipal social networking platforms and tools.

## **SECTION 8: PUBLIC RECORDS LAW: COMPLIANCE**

Municipal social media platforms and their related content are subject to Vermont's Access to Public Records Law. Any records produced or acquired in the course of municipal business, including material posted to municipal social media, may be a public record. Therefore, there should be no expectation of privacy regarding the information posted on municipal social media. Public records, regardless of format, are available for inspection and copying during customary business hours unless there is a specific statute exempting the record from public disclosure in whole or in part. Those records exempt from public inspection and copying are set out at 1 V.S.A. § 317(c).

## **SECTION 9: PUBLIC RECORDS LAW: RETENTION**

Municipal officials must comply with Vermont's Public Records Law when using municipal social media. Relevant records retention schedules apply to content on the official municipal website as well as to municipal social media. Content posted shall be retained pursuant to Vermont's Public Records Law in its standard format and in accordance with applicable disposition orders and retention schedules as established by the Vermont State Archivist and be available for copying and inspection during customary business hours.

## **SECTION 10: OPEN MEETING LAW: COMPLIANCE**

Municipal officials must comply with Vermont's Open Meeting Law when using municipal social media. All posts by members of the Town's public bodies that relate to municipal business are subject to the Open Meeting Law. Members (elected or appointed) of any municipal public body should refrain from using municipal social media to discuss the business of the public body or to take official action in violation of the Open Meeting Law. A member of a public body who "likes," "shares," "tweets," or otherwise engages in another member's content on municipal social media may be communicating municipal business and the Open Meeting Law may apply. Furthermore, members of public bodies should refrain from posting content on or responding to inquiries related to quasi-judicial matters within the subject matter jurisdiction of their respective public bodies.

Information posted by the Town on its social media will supplement, not replace, required notices and standard methods of providing warnings, postings, and notifications required to be made with regard to public meetings and hearings under Vermont law.

Employees found in violation of this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment in compliance with the Town's personnel policy.


Appointees and volunteers found in violation of this policy may be subject to removal from their respected public posts.

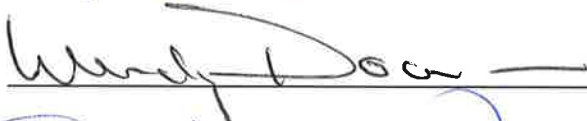
Elected officials found in violation of this policy may be subject to private or public admonishment and/or may be asked to resign their office.

The Town may seek all appropriate legal remedies including damages or a court-ordered injunction to enforce compliance with this policy.

ADOPTED this 22 day of August, 2024.

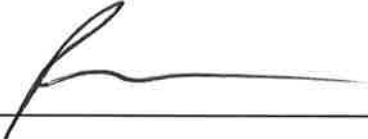
SIGNATURES of Selectboard:

  
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**Addendum A:  
Acknowledgement of Official Use by Municipal Officials**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, acknowledge that:

A. I have received a copy of the Town of Westford's Social Media Policy on \_\_\_\_\_ and it is my responsibility to familiarize myself with its contents;

B. I understand that it is my responsibility to ask questions if there is anything in the policy that I do not understand;

C. I understand that this policy replaces any and all prior versions and that the Town of Westford reserves the right to add, amend or discontinue any of the provisions of this policy for any reason or none at all, in whole or in part, at any time, with or without notice;

D. I acknowledge that I understand this policy and I agree that I will comply with all its provisions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Municipal Official's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date